

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
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AMEMBASSY BANJUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAKAR 4433

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR,US,GA
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL TO THE GAMBIA

1. SUMMARY. US RELATIONS WITH THE GAMBIA ARE EXCELLENT AT TIME WHEN HEIGHTENED AMERICAN INTEREST CREATED BY "ROOTS" PHENOMENON BRINGS NEW US CITIZEN SCRUTINY OF BILATERAL ACTIVITIES. GAMBIA'S EXAMPLE OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD DESERVE INCREASED OFFICIAL US ATTENTION. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MY OFFICIAL DEPARTURE FROM THE GAMBIA (JUNE 27, 1977) AFTER THREE AND A HALF YEARS AS US AMBASSADOR ACCREDITED THERE AND FOLLOWING A FAREWELL JOINT-ASSESSMENT WITH PRESIDENT DAWDA JAWARA, I CONSIDER THAT OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE EXCELLENT. OUR CONSULTATION ON MAJOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES IS FULL, FREE AND FRANK, AND RESULTS IN INCREASED IDENTITY OF VIEWPOINT IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS. THIS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP IS FACILITATED BY EASY ACCESS CHARGE AND I HAVE HAD AT HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND STRENGTHENED BY SUCCESS OF OUR BROADENING AND DEEPENING EMBASSY SELF-CONFIDENTIAL

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HELP, PEACE CORPS, AID, AND CULTURAL AND INFORMATION PROGRAMS.

3. IN A PERIOD WHEN SUCCESS OF ALEX HALEY'S "ROOTS" HAS TURNED THOUGHTS OF MILLIONS OF AMERICANS TO THE GAMBIA, OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP TAKES ON NEW IMPORTANCE AND WILL UNDERGO NEW SCRUTINY BY AMERICAN VISITORS.

4. THIS NEW INTEREST IS DEVELOPING AS GAMBIAN DEMOCRACY HAS JUST PASSED ANOTHER MILESTONE WITH SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION LAST APRIL OF ITS THIRD PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION SINCE INDEPENDENCE. ELECTION WAS ENTIRELY FAIR AND FREE, PERMITTING REPRESENTATION OF SMALL BUT POTENT OPPOSITION, WHILE RETURNING PRESIDENT JAWARA AND HIS PARTY WITH NEARLY 70 PERCENT OF VOTES CAST.

5. FEW COUNTRIES HAVE BETTER RECORD FOR DEVOTION TO FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS. OPPOSITION SPEAKS FREELY, MOVES EXTENSIVELY, AND CRITICIZES VIGOROUSLY. THERE ARE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE GAMBIA, NOR HAVE THERE EVER BEEN ANY. LAST GAMBIAN TO HAVE BEEN EXECUTED WAS CONDEMNED FOR MURDER IN COLONIAL DAYS, MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO (AND HE HAD TO BE SENT TO SIERRA LEONE, AS THERE WERE NO FACILITIES IN THE GAMBIA TO CARRY OUT SENTENCE). THE GAMBIAN JUDICIARY IS INDEPENDENT AND DOES NOT HESITATE TO RENDER OPINIONS AGAINST GOVERNMENT. IN ABSENCE OF ANY MILITARY UNITS, GAMBIAN LAW AND ORDER IS MAINTAINED SOLELY BY AN EFFICIENT 750 MAN POLICE FORCE.

6. ALTHOUGH AMONG WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES, THE GAMBIA PRACTICES FISCAL PRUDENCE, PAYS ITS BILLS, AND INCURS FEW DEBTS. THERE ARE NO WHITE ELEPHANTS
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IN THE GAMBIA. PRESIDENT JAWARA LIVES MODESTLY IN A RESIDENCE THAT SERVED VARIOUS COLONIAL GOVERNORS FROM EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY. FOREIGN AID IS NOT WASTED AND CORRUPTION IS MINIMAL.

7. IN SHORT, THE GAMBIA IS OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE AMONG STRUGGLING THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES OF STATE WHERE POVERTY DOES NOT EQUATE WITH DICTATORSHIP, AND WHERE INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE ALLOWED TO FLOURISH. I BELIEVE US POLICY SHOULD RECOGNIZE THIS PRAISEWORTHY EXAMPLE OF AFRICAN DEMOCRACY IN ACTION. WHILE OUR COMMITMENT TO GAMBIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS INCREASING, THIS FORWARD MOMENTUM MUST BE MAINTAINED.

8. I RECOMMEND THAT CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO HIGH LEVEL VISIT TO BANJUL BY REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ADMINISTRATION. THIS VISIT COULD BE FITTED INTO AN ITINERARY LARGELY DEVOTED TO OTHER MATTERS. BANJUL SHOULD BE GIVEN ADDED CONSIDERATION AS STOPOVER POINT FOR STATE, AID, USIA AND OTHER USG OFFICIALS DURING THEIR PERIODIC TRIPS TO AFRICA.

9. I ALSO RECOMMEND THAT PRESIDENT JAWARA BE INVITED TO VISIT WASHINGTON OFFICIALLY SOMETIME IN NEXT YEAR, PERHAPS TO COINCIDE WITH ONE OF HIS TRIPS TO NORTH AMERICA ON OTHER BUSINESS.

10. WHILE THE GAMBIA HAS RETAINED ITS CLOSE TIES WITH WESTERN DEMOCRACIES, INCLUDING SPECIAL UK RELATIONSHIP, IT HAS ALSO BROADENED ITS RELATIONS WITH MIDDLE EAST AND COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA HAS SIGNIFICANT, GROWING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND LIBYA STANDS OUT AMONG ARAB AID DONORS. USSR IS EXPANDING CULTURAL LINKS, WITH SOME EVIDENCE THAT OTHER ACTIVITIES ARE CONTEMPLATED HERE. THE GAMBIA IS MINDFUL OF THIRD WORLD ISSUES, AND SELDOM STRAYS FROM ITS PERCEPTION OF NON-ALIGNED CONSENSUS. IN
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SHORT, OUR POLICIES TOWARD THE GAMBIA ARE PROPERLY DIRECTED, BUT TO ADVANCE OUR INTERESTS WE MUST MAINTAIN MOMENTUM, WITH HIGH QUALITY FOLLOW-THROUGH, AS KEENER COMPETITION DEVELOPS AMONG THE GAMBIA'S BROADENING CIRCLE OF FRIENDS.
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